

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-08 OES-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /075 W

-----017002 310723Z /15

R 310616Z OCT 77

FM AMCONSUL SAPPORO

TO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 474

AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE

AMCONSUL FUKUOKA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAPPORO 105

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JA

SUBJECT: SOCIALISTS LOSE LAST STRONGHOLD IN HOKKAIDO

1. THE MAYORAL ELECTION LAST WEEK IN KUSHIRO, BY VOLUME JAPAN'S LARGEST FISHING PORT, SAW CONSERVATIVE INDEPENDENT, FORTY YEAR OLD TOSHIYUKI WANIBUCHI UPSET THREE-TERM SOCIALIST INCUMBENT TETSUO YAMAGUCHI. THE SOCIALISTS LOST THEIR LAST MAJOR STRONGHOLD IN HOKKAIDO BY A WIDE MARGIN (57 PERCENT VERSUS 43 PERCENT OF THE VOTE), REFLECTING PERHAPS A CONTINUING EXTENSION TO THE LOCAL LEVEL OF NATIONAL TRENDS TOWARD THE CENTER. DESPITE BOASTING THE SECOND LARGEST SOCIALIST PARTY PREFECTURAL MEMBERSHIP IN JAPAN, IN RECENT YEARS, THE HOKAIDO JSP HAS LOST MAYORSHIPS IN TWO OF THE LARGE MUNICIPALITIES: OBHIRO IN 1974 AND KITAMI IN 1975. OVERALL, LEFTIST CONTROL OF HIKKAIDO CITIES AND TOWNS HAS DECLINED FROM 14 IN 1971 TO 6 (OUT OF 32).

2. JSP LEADERS TURNED OUT IN FORCE TO SUPPORT YAMAGUCHI. CHAIRMAN NARITA, SECRETARY GENERAL ISHIBASHI AND YOKOHAMA MAYOR ASUKATA ALL MADE APPEARANCES ON HIS BEHALF. BIT OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT IN VIEW OF THE DISINTERGRATION WITHIN JSP ITSELF, THESE VISITS MAY HAVE DONE AS MUCH HARM AS GOOD TO
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YAMAGUCHI'S CAUSE.

3. STRONG LDP SUPPORT CONTRIBUTED TO WANIBUCHI'S VICTORY-- AND REJOICING REIGNED AT LDP HEADQUARTERS--BUT IN THE END, THE OUTCOME HINGED ON THE DECISION TAKEN IN TOKYO TO THROW KOMEITO'S CLAIMED 13,000 VOTES BEHIND WANIBUCHI. CONSIDERABLE DOUBT EXISTED BEFORE ELECTION DAY AS TO WHETHER KUSHIRO KOMEITO VOTERS,

WHO HAD SUPPORTED YAMAGUCHI IN THREE ELECTIONS, WOULD HEED THEIR PARTY'S DECISION TO BROADEN ITS COOPERATION WITH THE LDP AND THE DSP.

4. THE CONSENSUS AMONG POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN SAPPORO IS THAT DESPITE HIS YOUTH (HE IS 49), AND HIS OVERWHELMING POPULARITY IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS, IN SEEKING A FOURTH TERM YAMAGUCHI HAD ALSO SIMPLY RUN OUT OF STEAM. ALTHOUGH NOT ANTI-AMERICAN--HE ACCEPTED AN INTERNATIONAL VISITORS GRANT--YAMAGUCHI HAD FUEDED FOR THE LAST TWELVE YEARS, SOMETIMES BITTERLY, WITH BOTH THE CONSERVATIVE PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT AND THE GOJ. HIS ANTI-INDUSTRIALIZATION BIAS REPORTEDLY DISCOURAGED BUSINESSES FROM LOCATING IN KUSHIRO, CONTRIBUTING TO THE CITY'S ECONOMIC STAGNATION. MILITANTLY ANTI-JSDF, YAMAGUCHI LEPT ON THE SAPPORO HIGH COURT RULING THAT THE SELF DEFENSE FORCES ARE UNCONSTITUTIONAL TO CLOSE THE RECRUITING OFFICE IN KUSHIRO CITY HALL AND BARRED SDF SHIP CALLS. BUT PERHAPS THE MOST SERIOUS IRRITANT TO THE CONSERVATIVE CAMP WAS YAMAGUCHI'S ATTEMPTS TO BYPASS GOJ NEGOTIATORS TRYING TO SOLVE THE 200-MILE FISHING ZONE PROBLEMS. YAMAGUCHI APPARENTLY GOT SOME POLITICAL MILEAGE OUT OF AN APPEAL TO THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERIES CONSUL IN ALASKA EARLIER THIS YEAR, BUT THIS FAILURE TO CONCLUDE AN "AGREEMENT" WITH THE SOVIETS TO SUPPLY KUSHIRO WITH ALASKAN POLLACK, ALLEGEDLY CONFIRMED KUSHIRO FISHING INTERESTS THAT THE FISHING ISSUE SHOULD BE LEFT TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

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5. THE KUSHIRO ELECTION DEFEAT HAS THROWN THE HOKKAIDO JSP INTO DISARRAY. THE ENTIRE LEADERSHIP HAS RESIGNED IN DISGRACE, ALTHOUGH THEY WILL PROBABLY BE RE-INSTATED AT A GENERAL MEETING LATER THIS MONTH. ALREADY RENT WITH DISCORD NATIONALLY, THE JSP CAN HARDLY AFFORD TO SEE ONE OF ITS MOST POWERFUL LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS IMMOBILIZED.

6. NATIONALLY, THE CONSERVATIVES CAN TAKE HEART IN WANIBUCHI'S VICTORY, BUT THE BIG WINNER WOULD SEEM TO BE THE KOMEITO, WITHOUT WHOSE SUPPORT WANIBUCHI WOULD HAVE FAILED FOR A SECOND TIME IN A BID FOR THE MAYORSHIP. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF THE KOMEITO SWITCHES ITS SUPPORT FROM JSP INCUMBANTS SHIMANO TO A MODERATE CANDIDATE IN THE SENDAI MAYORAL ELECTION NEXT FEBRUARY.

WESTMORE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SOCIALISM, LOCAL ELECTIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 31-Oct-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977SAPPOR00105
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770400-0064
Format: TEL
From: SAPPORO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977102/aaaaabmv.tel
Line Count: 109
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 64722227-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 784388
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOCIALISTS LOSE LAST STRONGHOLD IN HOKKAIDO
TAGS: PINT, JA
To: TOKYO
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/64722227-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009